Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on Mutual Fisheries Relations
Basic Instrument for the U.S.-Russia Intergovernmental Consultative Committee (ICC)

Basic Instrument

Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on Mutual Fisheries Relations of May 31, 1988, as amended (TIAS 11442, the U.S.-Soviet Comprehensive Fisheries Agreement). Note: The obligations of the former Soviet Union under this agreement have devolved on the Russian Federation.

Implementing Legislation

Public Law 100-629 (An untitled Act that implemented the Comprehensive Fisheries Agreement. Enacted November 7, 1988).

Member Nations

The United States and the Russian Federation.

Meetings

The ICC meets alternately in the United States and Russia on an annual basis, at the discretion of the heads of delegation.

U.S. Representation

Under the Rules of Procedure established for the ICC, the United States and Russia designate a Representative and an Alternate Representative. The current U.S. Representative is Ambassador David Balton, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and Fisheries Affairs. The United States has not identified an Alternate Representative.

Pursuant to Section 5 of Public Law 100-629, a 12-member "North Pacific and Bering Sea Fisheries Advisory Body" was established to advise the U.S. Representative to the ICC. This body consists of the following individuals:

(A) The Director of the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife of the State of Washington;
(B) The Commissioner of the Department of Fish and Game of the State of Alaska;
(C) Five members appointed by the Secretary of State from a list of ten nominees provided by the Governor of Alaska; and,
(D) Five members appointed by the Secretary of State from a list of ten nominees provided by the Governor of Washington.

The current North Pacific and Bering Sea Advisory Body Representatives are:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game Representative:

Nicole Kimball, Federal Fisheries Coordinator, Anchorage, Alaska

Alaska

David Benton, Juneau, Alaska
Alvin Burch, Executive Director, Alaska Draggers Association, Kodiak, Alaska
Howard Hull, Hull Fisheries LLC, Anchorage, Alaska
Frank Kelty, Resource Analyst, City of Unalaska, Unalaska, Alaska
Simon Kinneen, Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation, Nome, Alaska

Washington Department of Fisheries and Wildlife Representative

William Tweit, Distant Waters and Columbia River Policy Lead, Olympia, Washington

Washington State

David W. Benson, Trident Seafoods Corporation, Seattle, Washington
Mark Gleason, Executive Director, Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers, Seattle, Washington
John Henderschedt, Executive Director, Fisheries Leadership and Sustainability Forum, Seattle, Washington
Paul MacGregor, Partner, Law Firm of Mundt, MacGregor, Happel, Falconer, Zulauf, and Hall, Seattle, Washington
Marlyn Twitchell, Consultant, Seattle, Washington

Description

The United States and the Russian Federation maintain the bilateral ICC fisheries forum pursuant to the U.S.-Soviet Comprehensive Fisheries Agreement, signed on May 31, 1988. The ICC is responsible for furthering the objectives of the Comprehensive Fisheries Agreement. These objectives include maintaining a mutually beneficial and equitable fisheries relationship through (1) cooperative scientific research and exchanges; (2) reciprocal allocation of surplus fish resources in the respective national 200-mile zones, consistent with each nation's laws and regulations; (3) cooperation in the establishment of fishery joint ventures; (4) general consultations on fisheries matters of mutual concern; and, (5) cooperation to address illegal or unregulated fishing activities on the high seas of the North Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea. The agreement expires on December 31, 2018.

In recent years, the ICC also has also served as the forum for negotiating a bilateral fisheries management agreement for the Northern Bering Sea and an agreement to prevent, deter, and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) harvesting of living marine resources.

Current Status

Pursuant to Article XIV of the 1988 Agreement on Mutual Fisheries Relations, representatives of Russia and the United States conducted the 24th Session of the ICC on Fisheries in Girdwood, Alaska, on September 11-13, 2013. The Russian delegation was led by Dr. Vasily Sokolov, Deputy Head, Federal Fisheries Agency of the Russian Federation, and the U.S. delegation, which consisted of representatives of the North Pacific and Bering Sea Fisheries Advisory Body, the U.S. State Department, NOAA, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Coast Guard, was led by Ambassador David Balton, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and Fisheries.

The U.S. side provided an update on the extension of the 1988 Agreement on Mutual Fisheries Relations and requested an update from the Russian Federation on the status of the exchange of diplomatic notes necessary to extend the Agreement. The Russian delegation indicated that the interagency process is ongoing and that the Agreement should be renewed by the end of the year.

Both sides reported on bilateral cooperation, including research, on the condition of Bering Sea and Sea of Okhotsk pollock stocks, marine mammals, and sea birds.

Bering Sea Pollock Stocks**:** The U.S. delegation reported on the status of U.S. pollock stocks. The dominant stocks in the U.S. EEZ of the Bering Sea are located in the eastern Bering Sea, the Aleutian Islands, and the Bogoslof Island area. (Additional details on the status of pollock stocks in the Bering Sea-Aleutian Islands (BSAI) can be found on the following website: http://www.afsc.noaa.gov/refm/stocks/assessments.htm.) The Russian side presented the results of Russian studies of pollock in the Bering Sea conducted during the inter-sessional period. From July 2012 to August 2013, 10 surveys were carried out in the Bering Sea. It was noted that in the Western Bering Sea, pollock stocks from the 2006, 2008, 2009 and 2010 year classes were above average. Studies of Navarin Basin pollock showed that its stock has stabilized. According to modeling data and by using a precautionary approach, the total allowable catch (TAC) for pollock for 2014 will remain at the 2013 TAC level. Due to the absence of abundant year classes of Karagin pollock in recent years, the TAC for 2014 was decreased twofold compared to the 2013 TAC level.

Marine Mammals

Walruses**:** **I**n 2013, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service initiated a multi-year, genetics based, capture-mark-recapture project for estimation of abundance and demographic rates (i.e. survival and recruitment) of Pacific walruses. This study requires the collection of a large number of skin biopsy samples from a representative sample of the Pacific walrus population and therefore sample collection must occur in both the U.S. and Russia. The United States proposed conducting a joint U.S./Russian research cruise in 2014 and 2015 to collect skin biopsy samples from walruses hauled out on sea ice in the Bering and Chukchi Seas.

Russia reported on research on Pacific walruses conducted in the Chukotka rookeries by ChuckotTINRO. In 2011-2012, observations were conducted on four rookeries along the Arctic coast to study walrus age and sex composition, external influence on walrus behavior, and other factors. Russia supported the U.S. proposal for a joint five-year research program in order to determine the abundance of shared walrus populations. Russia also proposed developing a common approach to assessing the indigenous walrus hunt's impact on both countries.

Steller Sea Lions**:** The United States presented research on the status of domestic and trans-boundary Steller sea lions and other marine mammals. The eastern and western stocks constitute the two main stocks of Steller sea lions in the North Pacific. The National Marine Fisheries Service conducts surveys of Steller sea lions every other year, weather permitting. Currently, the largest rookeries and major haulouts in the western population occur in the eastern Aleutians and western Gulf of Alaska. Steller sea lion populations in these areas are increasing. By contrast, the rookeries and haulouts in the western and central Aleutians are much smaller and continue to experience declines. Despite a decline in the western and central Aleutians, the U.S. portion of the western stock has shown an increasing trend between 2005 and 2012. Russia presented information regarding current sea lion distribution in the Chukchi area. Abundance of sea lions is at average levels in the Russian EEZ.

Crab Species**:** The U.S. side reported that Bering Sea snow crab continues to comprise the highest catch of crab stocks in the Bering Sea. All major stocks have exhibited a declining trend except for the Aleutian Islands golden king crab. Russia presented stock assessment data for three species of crabs in the western Bering Sea: blue king, snow, and tanner crab. Stocks of all three are currently stable and there is a trend toward an increase in the number of recruits. The total annual catch of all three species in the last few years was below the TAC.

Seabirds**:** The U.S. delegation reported on seabird bycatch trends in the Alaska groundfish fisheries and efforts undertaken to reduce the bycatch and provided an update on the endangered short-tailed albatross. Bycatch reduction efforts have progressed in the U.S. West Coast groundfish fisheries in response to the 2011 take of an endangered short-tailed albatross. The U.S. side also reported on the status of Kittlitz's murrelet, whose breeding range is limited to Alaska and the Russian Far East. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is working with Russian and American scientists to gain a better understanding of the species status and population size, particularly in the Russian portion of the Bering Sea. Sources of anthropogenic mortality have been identified—e.g. gillnet fisheries and oil spills. The Alaska Marine Mammal Observer Program has documented bycatch of Kittlitz's murrelet in several Alaska gillnet fisheries. The United States and Russia share many seabird resources and collaborations in areas such as bycatch assessment and reduction and at-sea surveys are possible and important.

Russia reported on the results of its sea bird bycatch studies, and the effectiveness of using streamers in the Russian long line fisheries, conducted in the last few years by KamchatNIRO, ChukotTINRO , and the Kamchatka branch of the Far East Academy of Science. The use of streamers helped reduce bycatch of sea birds, including rare species, and increased the efficiency of long-line fisheries. Following studies will include investigations of sea birds bycatch in other types of fisheries, as well as abundance assessment of sea birds on the Russian side of the Bering and Chukchi Seas.

Joint Research Planning, Data Exchanges, and Surveys**:** There is a long history of joint research planning between the Pacific Research Fisheries Center (TINRO) and the Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC). As part of mutual efforts to advance the research program in the Bering Sea under the ICC that was discussed at the January 2011 ICC workshop, the AFSC invited a Russian scientist, Dr. Mikhail Stepanenko of TINRO, to come to Seattle, Washington during March 25-29, 2013. The main purpose of the visit was to review the 2012 Bering Sea midwater and bottom trawl survey information from AFSC and TINRO and make recommendations about possible future research. In addition, research on fish ageing protocols for pollock and Pacific cod were discussed. Also reviewed was available information about commercial catch amounts, spatial distribution and size composition around the maritime boundary line. A report was prepared that summarized the discussions and recommendations for future scientific exchanges between AFSC and TINRO. Both research centers plan on continuing their scientific collaborations in the coming years. In summer and fall of 2013 and 2014, there will be further midwater survey efforts around the maritime boundary line. A scientific exchange of information regarding pollock ageing

protocols is also planned for 2014.

The Russian delegation presented plans for echo-integration and bottom trawl surveys in the Bering Sea in 2014. TINRO-Center conducted an echo-integration trawl survey in the northwestern Bering Sea in the Russian and U.S. EEZs adjacent to the maritime boundary in October 2012. It conducted the same survey in August-September 2013 and plans a similar survey in 2014. The TINRO-Center and AFSC are planning bottom trawl surveys in the Bering Sea in 2014, thus potentially creating a possibility to conduct intercalibration of fishing gear used during these surveys. The AFSC is comparing pollock age determination by scales (Russia) and otoliths (United States). TINRO-Center sampled pollock scales and otoliths in the northwestern Bering Sea in the summer of 2013 and volunteered to send, with funding support from the AFSC, a specialist to AFSC for joint age readings by scales and otoliths in early 2014.

Fisheries Enforcement Cooperation**:** The U.S. Coast Guard presented an overview of cooperative maritime law enforcement efforts over the past year conducted by the USCG District 17 and Kamchatka Border Guard Directorate of the FSB of Russia, focused on stemming IUU fishing activity in the vicinity of the maritime boundary line in the Bering Sea, as well as efforts focused on curtailing illegal large-scale high seas drift netting in the North Pacific. No IUU fishing was observed in 2013.

Other Issues of Mutual Interest: The two sides exchanged views on the results of the 17th Annual virtual Conference of Parties to the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Pollock Resources in the Central Bering Sea, the Agreement on Preservation of Transboundary Fish Stocks in the Central Sea of Okhotsk, North Pacific Fisheries Commission, the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) and in particular the proposed Ross Sea MPA, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization, the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) IUU Pathfinder, and efforts to negotiate a central Arctic Ocean high seas fisheries agreement.

Restructuring Future ICC Meetings**:** Both sides agreed that, at the 25th ICC meeting, there would be focused discussion on identifying potential opportunities for cooperative research and data exchange between the two countries relating to fisheries, habitat, and ecosystem processes in the Chukchi and Northern Bering Sea. This workshop would look beyond existing institutional arrangements and would facilitate the identification of research needs and next steps.

Time and place for the 25th ICC meeting: Russia will tentatively host the 25th ICC Meeting in mid-September 2014 in Vladivostok.

Staff Contacts

NOAA Fisheries:

Paul Niemeier
International Fisheries Affairs Division (F/IA1)
Office of International Fisheries
National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA
1315 East-West Highway, Room 10659
Silver Spring, MD 20910
Telephone: (301) 427-8371
Fax: (301) 713-2313
Email: paul.niemeier@noaa.gov

Department of State:

Michael Clark
Office of Marine Conservation (OES/OMC)
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW, Room 2758
Washington, D.C. 20520-7818
Telephone: (202) 647-3010
Fax: (202) 736-7350
Email: ClarkML2@state.gov